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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000586

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#) [NATIONAL](#) [ASSEMBLY](#)  
KUWAIT-IRAN RELATIONS  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES PUBLIC HOUSING, PARLIAMENTARY  
RELATIONS, IRAN WITH NEW HOUSING MINISTER

REF: A. KUWAIT 430  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 522

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: On 21 April, Ambassador met with new Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Wahid Al-Awadi to congratulate him on his appointment. Al-Awadi responded, "It is not always an honor to be a Minister in Kuwait," referring to the sometimes rough treatment of Kuwaiti ministers by the National Assembly. Al-Awadi did, however, express guarded optimism that relations between the Government and National Assembly would improve, at least in the near term. The Minister drew attention to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare's (PAHW) significant backlog in assigning public housing to Kuwaiti citizens and described the process whereby housing is assigned, which, he assured the Ambassador, is completely free of corruption and favoritism. Al-Awadi also referred to plans to create housing for divorced women and bachelor migrant workers. A retired Wing Commander in the Kuwait Air Force, the Minister expressed his concerns regarding the effects of a potential military conflict with Iran, while disparaging Iran's air warfare capability, suggesting that Iran's current air power is probably inferior to that of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. End Summary.

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Subsidized Housing, Part of Cradle-to-Grave Welfare  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) On 21 April, Ambassador met with new Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Wahid Al-Awadi to congratulate him on his appointment. The Minister explained that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW), which in the previous Government had been placed under the authority of the Minister of Public Works, is responsible for assigning public housing to Kuwaiti citizens, each of whom, upon marriage, is entitled to government-furnished housing on a 400 square meter plot along with a 70,000 KD (245,000 USD) zero-interest, 50-year mortgage. Although he admitted that PAHW currently has a waiting list of 65-70,000 families, Al-Awadi insisted that the assignment of homes is conducted on a strict first-come-first-serve basis that is immune to undue influence. In Al-Awadi's words, "Everyone knows that wasta (the power of influential connections) doesn't count in Housing." He added that five new residential cities currently under construction should help to relieve the housing backlog. Land, 98 per cent of which is owned by the Government in Kuwait, is allocated for public housing developments by the Kuwait Municipality with the approval of the Oil Ministry, which must first verify that it has no plans to use the land for oil development. PAHW employs about 1200 staff.

13. (SBU) When the Ambassador asked about public housing for divorced women, who are generally considered to be neglected by PAHW, the Minister said that new housing was being planned for divorced women, but providing housing to Kuwaiti families would remain PAHW's priority. Al-Awadi also explained that plans for separate bachelor housing communities for migrant workers were the responsibility of Kuwait Municipality, not PAHW. (Comment: Much of the impetus for creating these expat bachelor communities seems to stem from the perception that migrant workers are responsible for a disproportionate share of crime in Kuwait. Creating separate housing communities outside of the major population areas appears to be part of an effort to isolate certain groups of migrant workers from Kuwaiti society.)

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Guarded Optimism on Government - Parliament Relations  
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14. (C/NF) When the Ambassador congratulated him on the honor of being named Minister, Al-Awadi replied, "It is not always an honor to be a Minister in Kuwait," referring to the sometimes rough treatment of Kuwaiti ministers by the National Assembly. Al-Awadi, who was elected to his second term as an MP in 2006, said he expected relations between the Government and the National Assembly to improve since the Prime Minister had effectively distributed ministerial posts among the major political blocs in the Assembly (Ref. A). When the Ambassador asked about spillover from political infighting within the ruling Al-Sabah family into the National Assembly, Al-Awadi said that some factions of the ruling family try to pull strings in the Assembly to serve their own special interests. He also stressed, however, that the Assembly serves, or has served in the past, to provide a

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broad base of public support for Al-Sabah rule. Al-Awadi said a large majority of MPs were in favor of improved relations with the Government, at least in the near term. He noted, however, that one drawback of Kuwaiti democracy is that a single MP can effectively obstruct the entire Government through threats to grill ministers. He referred specifically to MP Dailfallah Buramya, who continues to threaten to grill the Finance Minister, despite the fact that he has very little support from other MPs (Ref. B). Al-Awadi described Buramya's efforts as a populist demagoguery related to the Finance Minister's opposition to Buramya's proposal to have the Government write off Kuwaitis' consumer loans. Al-Awadi suggested that the eventual formation of political parties, which do not have a legal status in Kuwait, might help to reduce the ability of individual MPs to paralyze the Government.

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Concerns about the Iranian Threat and Middle East Peace  
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15. (C/NF) As a former Wing Commander in the Kuwait Air Force, Al-Awadi said he feared the effects of a potential confrontation with Iran. He said he believed that Iranian generals were likely being honest with the Iranian leadership in their assessment of the weakness of Iran's military capability in comparison with that of the United States (in contrast to Saddam's generals, who dared not bring bad news). He said that in terms of air power, he believed Iran's capability to be even weaker than that of Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, since the Iranian aircraft are old and inadequately maintained. Al-Awadi said he did not understand Iran's need for nuclear weapon, since Iran already enjoys a position of strategic dominance in the region based on its population, resources, and size of its armed forces.

16. (C/NF) On the Middle East peace process, Al-Awadi said he found it encouraging that all of the principal stakeholders seemed to be talking seriously about the real issues that need to be addressed. He said he was particularly impressed

by the leadership being shown by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

Bio Note

17. (C/NF) Al-Awadi graduated from U.S. Navy Flight School at NAS Pensacola in 1977. He was trained as a helicopter pilot and flew the H-1 Huey. He later underwent training in the UK to become a flight instructor. In 1990, Al-Awadi was one of the pilots who flew Kuwaiti aircraft to Saudi Arabia to escape the invading Iraqi forces. He retired from the Kuwait Air Force in 1992. Al-Awadi has two adult daughters and a teenage son.

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LeBaron